

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method for controlling access to a product, the method comprising the steps of:
 - 2 (a) receiving a request for a product;
 - 3 (b) generating, substantially at the time the request is received, a license
4 string that controls access to the product; and
 - 5 (c) transmitting the license string to the requestor.
- 1 2. The method of claim 1 wherein step (a) comprises receiving a request via a distributed
2 communications network.
- 1 3. The method of claim 1 wherein step (a) comprises:
 - 2 (a-a) receiving a request for a product; and
 - 3 (a-b) receiving payment information from the requestor.
- 1 4. The method of claim 3 further comprising the step of verifying the received payment
2 information.
- 1 5. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises using a cryptographic process to
2 generate a license string that controls access to the product.
- 1 6. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises using a cryptographic process to
2 generate a license string encoding a character text string, the license string controlling
3 access to the product when supplied by the requestor.
- 1 7. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises using a cryptographic process to
2 generate a license string encoded as an upper case alphanumeric string, the characters in
3 the text string excluding capital O, capital I, and numbers 0 and 1, the license string
4 controlling access to the product when supplied by the requestor.

- 1 8. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises using a cryptographic process to
2 generate a license string encoding:
 - 3 the date of creation of the license string;
 - 4 the number of users enabled by the license string; and
 - 5 the type of license string created.
- 1 9. The method of claim 8 wherein step (b) further comprises including validation
2 information in the generated string.
- 1 10. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises generating, substantially at the time
2 the request is received, a license string that controls access to a single facility.
- 1 11. The method of claim 1 wherein step (b) comprises generating, substantially at the time
2 the request is received, a license string that controls access to multiple facilities.
- 1 12. The method of claim 1 wherein step (c) comprises transmitting the license string to the
2 requestor via a distributed communications network.
- 3 13. The method of claim 1 wherein the product functions for only a predetermined period
4 of time before the license string is entered.
- 1 14. The method of claim 13 wherein the license string extends the predetermined period of
2 time for which the product will function.
- 1 15. A system for controlling access to a product, the system comprising:
 - 2 an input unit receiving a request for a product;
 - 3 a license string generator in electrical communication with said input unit, said
 - 4 license string generator producing, substantially at the time a request is received, a
 - 5 license string that controls access to the product;
 - 6 an output unit transmitting the license string to the requestor.
- 1 16. The system of claim 15 wherein said input unit is in electrical communication with a
2 network and said input unit receives a request for a product via the network.

- 1 17. The system of claim 15 wherein said license string generator uses a cryptographic
2 engine to produce a license string.
- 1 18. The system of claim 15 wherein said license string generator generates a license string
2 controlling access to a single facility.
- 1 19. The system of claim 15 wherein said license string generator generates a license string
2 controlling access to multiple facilities.
- 1 20. The system of claim 15 wherein said output unit is in electrical communication with a
2 network and said output unit transmits the product and the associated license string to
3 the requestor via the network.
- 1 21. An article of manufacture having computer-readable program means embodied thereon,
2 the computer-readable program means comprising the system of claim 15.
- 1 22. An article of manufacture having computer-readable program means for electronically
2 distributing a product, the computer-readable program means comprising:
3 computer-readable program means for receiving a request for a product;
4 computer-readable program means for generating a license string that enables
5 the product when supplied by the requestor;
6 computer-readable program means for associating the license string with the
7 product; and
8 computer-readable program means for transmitting the product and the
9 associated license string to the requestor.
- 1 23. The article of manufacture of claim 22 further comprising computer-readable program
2 means for receiving payment information from the requestor.